

THE SHADOW OF GOD

THE SHADOW OF GOD

A Sonnet-Sequence

by

G. K. CHETTUR



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Verse:

SOUNDS AND IMAGES
THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE
GUMATARAYA
THE TEMPLE TANK

Prose:

THE GHOST CITY
(Fiction)
COLLEGE COMPOSITION
THE LAST ENCHANTMENT
(Recollections of Oxford)
ALTARS OF SILENCE
(Themes for Meditation and Prayer)

TO
THE DEAR MEMORY
OF
MY MOTHER

FEBRUARY 10, 1984

I OFFER ALL DUE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
TO THE EDITORS OF THE VARIOUS JOURNALS
IN WHICH MY POEMS HAVE APPEARED.

First Published: 1935

*Because it is impossible to tell
By spoken word how far the heart may reach;
Because a look, or clasp of hand may well
By thought unspoken, yet divined, exceed
The consolations of most intimate speech:
I, both denied me, in this hour of need,
Come with these stray haphazard songs to make,
Because I've sorrowed too, for old time's sake,
My slendering offering of love's belief,
Bound by this dear community of grief.*

G. K. C.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

I

I CANNOT tell if sea or jewelled sky
Or the rich, bearing earth, delights me most:
 But when at dawn, Thou send'st Thine armed host
Of dew-washed blossoms to besiege mine eye,
And the blue mountain tops serenely greet
 The splendours of the plain, I doubt no more.
 But when at eve, I walk upon the shore,
And the green serpent seas come to my feet,
I watch the changing waters sweep and pass,
 With deepest exultation. But apace
 Comes the swift darkness with revealing grace,
And lo!—I stand upon the pebbled grass,
 Vanquished and speechless, Lord! before Thy might,
 The centre of a universe of Light!"

THE SHADOW OF GOD

II

ON a fair morning when a cloudless sky
Leans o'er the glittering earth, as tender-eyed
As a fond mother o'er a new-decked bride
Breathing her benedictions in a sigh,--
Climb to the feet of Chamundeswari:
Far, far below, and radiant in its pride,
Set like a jewel preciously aside,
See sparkling on the plain's immensity,
Mysore! fond city of a monarch's dream.
There, fadeless Beauty holds dominion,
Dwells in each dome, each minaret, each spire,
And walks in pleasures that glint and gleam,
By fountains that jet forth their hearts of fire,
And waters, still as mirrors, in the sun.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

III

ed **O** LOVELY city of the heart's desire,
Of hope, of glamour, of inviolate dreams:
At all times lovely, as a pearl that gleams,
Of which the raptured eye can never tire
As soft it breathes upon love's bosom fair:
 Lovely at dawn, at noon, at shadowing eve,
 But loveliest when at dusk the sunbeams leave
Thy flashing diadem for Night to wear:
I see thee crowned against the starry skies
 In loveliness of light unparalleled,
While wave on fiery wave beneath my feet
 Such beauty breaks as I have ne'er beheld
 Or dreamed could be: Oh, were this Paradise,
God's dwelling-place, who would not think it meet?

THE SHADOW OF GOD

IV

“ **L**IGHT is the shadow of God ” I heard one say,
Who played awhile with glittering fantasies,
And strove to understand with images
The un-understandable : Oh we, whose clay
The touch of life makes coarser day by day,
Whose shadow is darkness, and whose ending is
Dust in a bitter home of silences,
All that we know is that we walk the way
Myriads have trod before, the selfsame path,
Beset by shadows to the very last,
(Dark spirits of grief, of love, of fear, of wrath)
And we like shadows of a shade move past,
Exultant still, or vainly clamorous,
To where the last shadow of all awaiteth us.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

V

“ **L**IGHT of the Palace ! ” *Taj Mahal*, he named
Thee, Mumtaz, Queen ; but when Death laid thee low
Before thy time, O what could match the woe
Of thy imperial lover whom naught had tamed
But only love of thee ?—Availed him naught
In that unutterable grief, his State :
Splendour and pomp made but more desolate
The blind and bitter anguish of his lot.
Then over thee he fashioned such a tomb
As for all time to come shall speak thee fairest,
Best loved of women, and most glorified :
Yet know, fond mortal, thou that idly starest,
Seest in marble but the common doom
That humbled to the grave a monarch’s pride.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

VI

BUT this same doom that takes us one by one,
And loveliest things into corruption throws,
Quenching the glory of the fiercest sun,
Fretting the heart of every flower that blows,
Bids from that charnel-house of Beauty's pride
Beauty anew each instant to arise,
And from corruption where it sank and died
Compels a sweeter incense to the skies.
Therefore, be glad: the lily and the rose
Fall, but they die not, though they fade each hour,
And, love! thy beauty, when at last it goes
To the cold grave, as fair again shall flower,
To make rich summer in as fond a breast
As now, for love of thee, is overblest.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

VII

A LAS, how shall the heart be comforted
With idle talk about the lily and rose,
The lover's heart that in possession knows
Love's sole defence against the wormy bed?
For vulture-like he circles overhead
And narrows on his prey, this foe of foes,
Watching and waiting for the pitiless close,
Nor grants new lease of loving to the dead.
One rose the more, or yet one lily less,
Or that the sum of beauty is the same,
Means nought to him that loves! All loveliness
He sees through love's fond eye, and offereth
A breaking heart to the devouring flame,
Because he knows the shadow of Love is Death!

THE SHADOW OF GOD

VIII

I LOOKED on Death today, with tears unshed,
In bitter humiliation of such peace
As there, upon that brow, those lips, I read ;
 Such sovereign quiet as life's melodies
In deepest raptures yield not to this clay,
 Striving awhile—O fondness !—to forget,
But at their close make room for Death to play
 A greater melody than any yet.
Abased I stood, abased and wondering there,
 Fretting, midst tears and sobs, impatiently,
And could have smiled in face of very despair,
 At thought of this unknowing mockery :
 For who of mortal birth can life bespeak,
When at one stroke Death offers what we seek ?

THE SHADOW OF GOD

IX

So this is death: to lie so still, so still,
Shrouded and cold and stiff, with never a sign
That yearningly beside its earthly shrine
Lingers e'en yet the new-awakened Will!—
For the forsaken dust, now all the skill
Of man avails naught, howsoever benign,
And for the mourner is no anodyne
But Time, compassionate drug of every ill.
Now in this little room I stand alone,
Where life has left this body desolate,
And islanded with Death I see at last,
(The living blood throb-throbbing on the bone),
Seething and swirling blindly to its fate,
The tremulous world I know, go rushing past.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

X

IT is impossible that this should be—
O sacrilegious and destroying thought!—
 The end, of things forgot and unforget,
The bitter end of Hope and Charity:
For so, the beauty that we hourly see,
 The glory that each moment flows unsought
 Into our souls becomes a thing of nought,
And less than a forgotten memory.
No sound, but trembles in the deeps of space
 Treasured in endless time: No thought that flames
But the all-knowing Mind doth comprehend:
And we, to whom the light upon thy face
 Was as a beacon-flare to all our aims,
We are the proof that this is *not* the end.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XI

“ **S**HE will not die: the gracious light of her
Shall shine upon this home for many years,
For Saturn in the Seventh House appears
Against the Moon.” Thus spoke the astrologer.
And we, our planetary faith astir,
Hoping against all hope, forbade our fears
And thrust from weary eyes the scalding tears,
Because the man was never known to err.
Where went the four score moons and four he gave,
Plucked from the generous heavens without a doubt?
What cataclysm unforeseen, what wave
In the great firmament of time threw out
His certain calculations? Ere one day
Had ended thou hadst gone thy pilgrim way!

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XII

NOR sky, nor stars, nor sea, nor stormy wind
Has power to heal this hurt of everything;
The mortal measure of such passioning
Doth far outrun the grief of body and mind.
And now the quiet spaces call for you
And are not answered; and the winds make moan
To the rude seas and over lands unknown,
And are not comforted; for you were true
To the heart's call, and ever your wisdom made
A tenderness about our thoughts: but now
All things are changed. Oh! how shall we avow
How nobly you went forth, how unafraid!
Only your faith in us still keeps us true,
And yet we live in hope, because of you.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XIII

A LAS, how soon doth life make common cause
With her unalterable enemy
To slay the body's pride with loss on loss,
 Indignity upon indignity :
To clip the aspiring wing that would outsoar
 In one impassioned flight the world's turmoil :
To fling back carelessly the glittering ore
 Uplifted from the depths with dizzy toil :
To set the homing craft adrift once more
 Upon uncharted waters till it creep
Again to some far hospitable shore
 Borne by fierce tides across the roaring deep :
 Grant us, O Lord, the wisdom here to see
 Beyond this passionate futility.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XIV

WE shall not look upon your face again,
Nor hear your laugh, nor see your welcoming smile
And many a lonely hour shall love beguile
With thought of you to ease our sorrow in vain.

O Destiny incalculably strong!—
Stronger than any strength that Love could give
To hearten you and bid you sweetly live
When most to life did love and joy belong :
Where, on what shores of superhuman toil
Does niggard Time now measure out your days?
Perhaps, more clearly now you see our ways
Threading the mazes of the world's turmoil.

O warn us of the pitfalls and the snares,
When we, bemused with life, walk unawares.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XV

ALL things are yet the same: the conquering bee
Murmurs his passion to the yielding rose
Before he takes the spoils of victory;
The self-same chatter as it gaily flows
Comes from the hidden spring; the trembling dew
Holds the keen eye with beauty on the lawn,
Setting the sun's bright seal each morn anew
On blossom and bush and tree; but you are gone
And nevermore will see the grey mist sweeping
Up the dark valley like a fleet of ships,
Or see the moon's broad smiling face come peeping
Over the hill, or as it coyly slips
Behind the tamarind: all things are yet
The very same: but we cannot forget!

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XVI

EACH hour is filled with sad awakenings,
For every mood of sun-filled sky or sea
Or drowsy plain or mist-topped mountain brings
A stab that wounds the heart of memory.
O how can we forget, to whom all things
Dawned through thine eyes and at thy bidding rose
Borne on the wave of thine imaginings
To light our darkness? Oh! what pitiful shows
Have these become! What mockery of light
When light has grown more sightless than the day
What bitter taunt of Faith in Hope's despite,
When sun and shadow, rain and rainbow play
On eyes that falter at each grieving breath,
An ever losing game with pitiless Death!

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XVII

NOTHING that is, or has been, or will be,
Can from this shadowed instant be the same,
When from your body the invisible flame
Surged back once more into Infinity.
For now the least of all our thoughts and fears,
Forward in dateless Time, or hastening back
Down the inevitable and steep track
Up which we toiled with the ascending years,—
The very texture of our inmost being,—
Shall with this loss be tinctured, till there fall
About our lives thy presence mystical
To guide our erring footsteps that unseeing
Walk in the Valley of the Shadow where
Life is a round of sorrow and despair.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XVIII

THOU hast been busy Death, as ne'er before :
 Too busy : one by one, betrayed by thee,
They that we loved have stumbled through thy door
 And paid the debt of their mortality.
So on their stalks the lovely blossoms fade,
 Or shaken by rude breezes flutter and fall,
And one with the dust the beauty that they made
 Goes into nothingness beyond recall :
But not to nothingness do ye depart,
 But where we shall be proud to come when Fate
Has cast our reckoning. O cowardly Heart !—
 Death shall in no wise make us desolate,
 And by this thought shall we be comforted,
 The dead shall know how to receive the dead.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XIX

TO a far country that we know not of,
Death leads us swiftly, surely, and we go
Alike from those we hate and those we love,
From present joy or old remembered woe.
Alas, it matters not who goes before,
They that are left behind must hasten after.
Death laughs at those who talk of nevermore,
And turn to windy sighs the gift of laughter.
O foolish heart, be glad therefore, and strong;
Grief mocks at life: Grief does not understand:
Thy dead shall welcome thee with rapturous song,
They watch thy shadowy progress to their land.
Too brief thy time for sorrow or for strife,
He that would conquer Death must conquer Life.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XX

WHEN I remember now how in old days
The poignant dream of separation came
(That some dread future moment should abase)
With hint of Cowper's grief and Masefield's ~~sham~~
And love for thee became an agony
Unbearable because not understood,
At this mine own insensibility
I am amazed, and fear this present mood
Of philosophical ingratitude
That to thy dear and radiant memory
Gives such insulting lie, to all the good
The great, the noble things we loved in thee.
And, "do I love thee less?"—I ask in fear,
"Or, is my mind upborne to thy new sphere?"

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXI

THOU art where thou shouldst be : thy spirit here
Looked longingly upon the changeless stars
And chafed against the intolerable bars
Of the importunate flesh : year after year
Time laid his softening hand upon thy brow
But never bowed the swift victorious will
That made thee wise and strong to champion still
The sad, the weak, the destitute. But now
Unhindered of this mortal servitude,
With all thy strength, thy tenderness renewed,
Thou dost rejoice at nobler work to do,
With surer touch, help loyal and more true.
Therefore I am content, and all my grief
Is changed into a hope beyond belief.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXII

IF Death should take me by the throat today,
And hold me up, and look me in the eyes,
And, ere he rattled from this suffering clay

The latest breath, did sternly bid devise
Fair cause and just that might his stroke delay,

I should but point to yonder bannered skies,
Where the great sun quick flaming on his way

Pranks all the East in hues of Paradise,
And murmur "Strike!", and patient wait the blow,

Low murmuring still,—" 'Tis there I fain would be,
Freed from this bondage dark. O who would show

One single cause, or fair or just, to thee

Thou great releaser, Death, when from afar
The Heavens beckon and the Morning Star?"

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXIII

Dawn o'er the rushes, and the waterfowl
Rise from the swirling ground-mist with a whirr,
Making for yon cane patch with sudden stir,
While in a tree-top a bewildered owl
Hoots dully to a strident cock; dogs growl
Then stretch and bark, each yapping cur on cur,
And roused from sleep comes forth the villager
His blanket wrapped around him like a cowl.
And so the busy day begins again,
The narrowing sun climbs fiercely overhead,
The patient bullock treads his tracks of pain,
And man his round of toil uncomforted,
Till the long shadows o'er the landscape spread
And Night restores what grasping Day has ta'en.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXIV

UP the green sloping sward the boulders run
Blackened by immemorial rain and sun,
To where against the glittering blue of the sky,
Eight granite pillars proudly rear on high
A granite roof. All breathless there I stood
And watched the green earth, in exultant mood,
Drop to the tiny fields: and there, alone,
Upon that height, I thought, "If I could own
All that I see, as far as sight might reach,
I should be happy!" Then, as if to teach
On what unprofitable things we place
Our worldly store, suddenly Heaven's face
Was veiled by a grey mist that leapt and curled
About me closely, blotting out the world.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXV

I THOUGHT of one whose loveliness had made
Green summer in my heart when I was young,
And I went singing through the sun and shade
The joy that now may nevermore be sung.
Yet all I am, and all I may be, reach
With hesitant hands to those miraculous days
When beauty blossomed into fragrant speech
And every day was one long day of praise.
Today a touch, a something in the eye
Of one who smiled and spoke a casual word
Awoke this longing memory. Time may fly
Beyond man's reach like any singing bird
But sometimes suddenly it courses back
Like lightning, on its own imperious track.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXVI

THANK God for little mercies, for they keep
The cup of bitter life from running over:
O you, in vain, who labour to discover
A taste of sweetness in the tears you weep,
Be glad for those swift moments of respite,
Those glimpses of a brief infinity,—
The sudden marvel of a moon-flecked sea,
The strength of mountains in the morning light.
Thank God for little mercies: Children's laughter,
For grace of bodies, for the light in eyes,
Of love, once seen, and ne'er forgotten after:
For dawn, for sunset, for grey star-lit skies:
And when these are not, for those silences,
More blessed, holding memory of these.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXVII

“**T**HE shadow of God is light!”—I hear it ring
With echoing changes down the crypts of thought,
And am amazed and wildered, God being not
At any time a ponderable thing,
But a slow growth from inner passioning,
A faith, a hope, in richer moments caught,
And on Life’s anvil sorrowfully wrought
To each man’s inmost need of solacing.
And in green forest glooms one dwells apart,
And one in temples; while a third doth draw
A God-like rapture from the urge of art:
A fourth divines Him in the lowliest sod;
And no man, late or soon, but sees with awe
He breathes and moves within the shadow of God.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXVIII

AYE, e'en the Fool, that sayeth in his heart
"There is no God!"—For he, unwittingly,
Denies the Grace that made him, nor doth see
The loveliness of which he forms a part.
He knoweth not yet of man's divine estate:
 Beauty and Love to him are but a name,
 And life, a fitful momentary flame:
Nothing he does but is contaminate.
He hath no comfort in the sorrowing sea:
 He seeth in light but shadow, and his gloom
No ray illumines: his spirit leapeth not
 But narrows all Heaven to the bitter tomb;
And blindly, till the appointed hour is wrought,
He struts in pitiful pride, unseeing, by Thee !

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXIX

So muse I sadly midst the encircling hills,
Above the frenzied tumult of the plains,
Tranced by the murmur of a thousand rills;
The strong winds battle round me, till day wanes
And from the East comes up the ghostly moon;
Then like old monsters the great shadows creep
Out of Night's cave, awakened from their swoon,
To watch the tireless constellations sweep.
How still the world is!—Lord, now all my being
Stirred to this passion trembles like a star:
I know not what I am, and mute, unseeing,
I stretch forth piteous hands to Thee afar:
And through hushed silence to my spirit's calls
Comes the grave music of Thy waterfalls.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXX

HOW lovely the land lies beneath the moon!
Fairer a hundred times than love or life;
Fairer than Death, the end of mortal strife!....
Now langorous as lilies in the noon,
The very palms appear to sway and swoon
With this excess of loveliness; and the sea
Awaits, in patience, hushed, expectantly,
For what?—Ah who may tell?—Or yet how soon.
O mortal beauty irreconcilable,
Blossom immaculate of eternity,
Changeless, yet ever changing mystery,
Compelling all within thy potent spell!
What in thy glory may we here divine?
A hope?—A longing?—Nay, a certain sign!

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXXI

A SIGN, that of the living whole we make
A part incorporate, however small,
A fragment of the passion that doth fall
In sudden glory upon hill or lake:
A symbol, a remembrance to awake
The sleeping Godhead to a memory
Of what has been and what again shall be,
And still the heart's intolerable ache.
Nay more: a pledge renewed from hour to hour
In song, in love, in dream, in children's eyes;
Writ on the laughing heavens, the sorrowing sea;
Sealed on the morning face of every flower;
And even as the rainbow in the skies,
A covenant of God's integrity.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXXII

REAT thoughts, good thoughts, kind thoughts that
closely bind
The immortal soul to hope, for evermore,
Fall through the ether of the quiet mind
Like sudden rain upon a barren shore.
Then for a while the wind blows soft, the grass
Turns the grey desert into emerald leas,
And rainbow birds flash forth and quiver and pass,
Making rich music in the happy trees.
Thus paradisally doth beauty breed,
Flashed from the Almighty's Will, within the mind
Until in noble word or nobler deed
Of grace inexplicably intertwined
As form and fragrance in each flower of earth
It come to sudden, and to glowing birth.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXXIII

THE shadow of God is Beauty: Beauty won
From the bright looms of Time—a heavenly boon,
Beauty that floweth from the lordly sun,
Beauty that pearleth from the lustrous moon;
Beauty of hand, of eye, of lip, of hair,
Beauty of word, of thought, of kindly deed,
Beauty of Faith, and Beauty, O most rare,
Of him who sacrificeth in his need.
So in his shadow of Beauty doth appear
The God we know not but by ministry,
And walketh in our common ways and drear,
Touching to wonder and to melody,
For him to hear who hath the ears to hear
For him to see who hath the eyes to see !

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXXIV

WHEREFORE the poet in immortal strain,
"Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty!"—Keats, that word
Flung from thy suffering mind, and not in vain,
 Falls on the scoffer like a flashing sword
Cutting life clean; and all the shallowness,
 The insincerity, the mean deceit,
The doubts that canker and the fears that press,
 Drop at the withering touch about our feet.
For, as the splendid sun reflected turns
 A drop of dew into a diamond,
So lighted Truth in each gross body burns
 Revealing Beauty with her magic wand:
 Twin flaming spirits that no coils can bind,
 Image and symbol of the Almighty's mind.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXXV

SMITE me, O Lord, with Beauty till these eyes
Behold all Beauty as a part of Thee;
Trace Thy swift touch upon the changing skies
And know Thy hand upon the sorrowing sea.
Smite me, O Lord ! again, and yet again,
That through the gloom Thy arrowy light may run
Straight to the anguished heart, the palsied brain,
A thousand times ere yet the day be done,
Unfurl Thy banners and make sharp Thy spears,
And fling Thy dawns and sunsets down the years :
Unleash Thy tempests, and Thy torrents loose —
Destroy me if Thou wilt : I shall but choose
With my last breath to yield my body's pride
Transfigured in Thy light and glorified.

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XXXVI

LO, the East reddens and the day is near,
And I who praised all Beauty and all Life,
Despite of sorrow, and the rising tear,
 Come to the ending of this long-drawn strife :
And yet, perchance, if through the mists of rhyme,
 From the hard pressing gloom, there should loom forth
The shadow of the Eternal, the Sublime,
 How faint soever, it is something worth !
For we that live within the Shadow of God,
 Whose very breath is of his Grace and Love,
Too seldom know within the untroubled clod
 The spark that lights us to the realms above,
 Forgetful that all Good, all seeming ill,
 Are but the facets of the Eternal Will.

THE SHADOW OF GOD

XXXVII

Lord of unnumbered hopes, unnumbered prayers,
Immaculate dream, unknown, unknowable
To mortal sense save dimly through the spell
Of earth's delights and quickening despairs,
Forgive what we have been, and what we are,
For that which in Time's fulness we shall be !
Thou art the Light, and in Thy shadow we
Move in our pathways like a growing star.
Make grow our comprehension till we see
Through life's bewildering complexity
The touch by which inscrutably is wrought
Thy will: and shape each word, each act, each thought,
Until we learn to read Thy will aright
And pass from shadow to Eternal Light.

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THE LAST ENCHANTMENT

(RECOLLECTIONS OF OXFORD)

BY

G. K. CHETTUR

Principal, Government College, Mangalore

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THE

I have just returned from Canada to find your charming Volume of Memories which I have read with great enjoyment. You certainly succeeded in extracting the quintessential spirit of the place, and I admire the simple and unaffected grace with which you have contrived to convey your impressions of men and things to the reader. I wish that all Indian students who come to Oxford could have your book put into their hands as an introduction to the treasures of experience and enjoyment which are theirs for the taking if they have the vision and the sympathy . . .

THE RT. HON'BLE H. A. L.

Mr. Chettur has made a wide reputation for himself as a poet and writer. The Last Enchantment is an excellent addition to the group of books by him. His widely sympathetic outlook and his charming way of telling a story make this one of the best books on Indian life in England.

THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA, BOMBAY.

An Indian's impressions of Oxford excite our curiosity, and Mr. Chettur's have one surprise: it is difficult to believe that a foreigner could have written them. The very title of his book is one that a young Englishman might have chosen; there is no trace of the foreigner in his style. It is pleasant to learn that an Indian can slip into Oxford with the ease and pleasure that Mr. Chettur records.

THE LONDON MERCURY.

Mr. Chettur is admittedly one of the best writers of the English language in India. He has caught the spirit of the English style The publication of this book is indeed a successful attempt to show us the softer and lovelier sides of Oxford life. Mr. Chettur writes with passionate devotion about Oxford. The memories of Oxford that the author has set down are varied in character. The book is very enjoyable reading and it shows that an Indian can write as well as any Englishman.

THE HITAVADA (NAGPUR).

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THE MODERN REVIEW

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